

A high-rise icon for Hamburg

Following the opening of the world-famous Elbphilharmonie, Germany's second-largest city aims to welcome another outstanding building



↑ A sight for the city: The Elbtower soars 235 meters into the sky with the river Elbe in the foreground and Hamburg's famous silhouette in the background (Picture Credit © DCA/picture alliance/Christian Charisius/dpa)

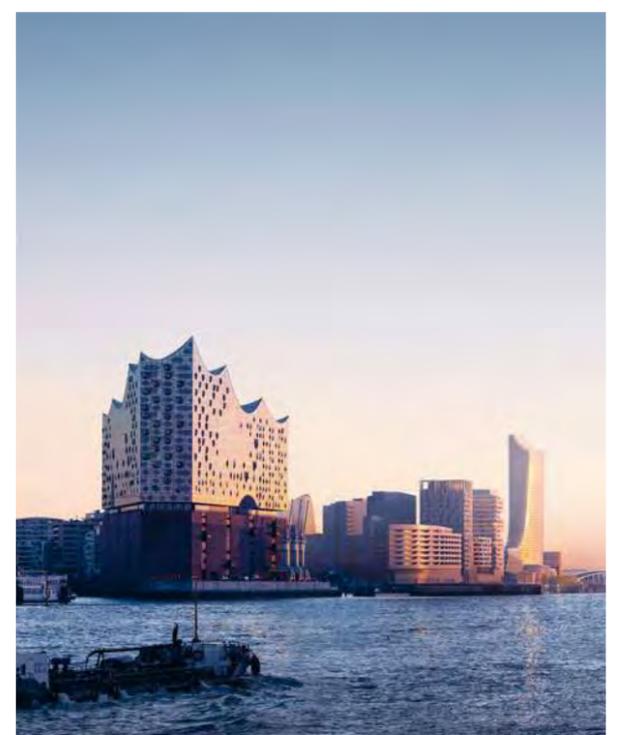
A grand finale and a soaring overture: The Elbtower proposed by SIGNA Prime Selection AG and David Chipperfield Architects (Berlin) would not only bring Hamburg's internationally renowned HafenCity to a majestic conclusion, but also herald the development of exciting new urban areas. At 235 meters in height, the tower would add yet another landmark building to Germany's second-largest city – which only celebrated the opening of the famous Herzog & de Meuron-designed Elbphilharmonie concert hall in January 2017 – if the proposal is approved by the Hamburg Parliament. With a gross floor area of over 100,000 square meters, the Elbtower would offer new office space with spectacular views and excellent transportation links. A broad variety of usages including a hotel, bars, restaurants as well as retail and exhibition space would be accommodated in the publicly accessible base of the tower. Scheduled for construction in 2021, the project would underline Hamburg's thriving urban development and strong market position.

A growing reputation

Hamburg enjoys a growing national and international reputation, ranking second out of all European cities in the 2017 edition of the prestigious Emerging Trends in Real Estate rankings published by the Urban Land Institute (ULI) and PriceWaterhouseCooper (PWC). Office market reports confirm that a

new record was set in 2017: According to real estate agents Großmann & Berger, around 640,000 m² of office space were let to new tenants – 16 percent more than in the previous year. Figures published by Jones Lang Lasalle show the office vacancy rate to have dropped to 4.8 % – its lowest level since 2002. The current dynamic on the market for rental offices in Hamburg indicates that demand is set to remain high, with Großmann & Berger forecasting a drop in supply from as early as 2018. The trend is also positive where growth in prime and average rents is concerned.

“The strength of the Elbtower brand will have a positive effect on such trends,” explains Prof. Jürgen Bruns-Berentelg, Chairman of the Executive Board of HafenCity Hamburg GmbH. He believes the whole city will benefit from the project: “Attractive, diverse usage mixes and exceptional architectural concepts are set to strengthen Hamburg's positive growth prospects over the long term.” Speaking at the unveiling of Chipperfield's design in early February, Hamburg's Mayor Olaf Scholz was not just delighted to be announcing plans for yet another landmark building: “It is equally important that we have been able to find a private developer whose solid financial foundation and extensive experience of similarly complex projects put them in a position to ensure successful project implementation.”



↑ Kindred spirits: The Elbtower seen from the west with the Elbphilharmonie rising majestically in front (Picture Credit: © DCA/picture alliance/Christian Charisius/dpa)

Fortsetzung auf Seite 2 →

Developer SIGNA Prime Selection AG can claim to be one of the largest real estate corporations in Europe, with a current portfolio of 23 trophy properties and a gross asset value of some 8.5 billion Euros. "Our project goal is to create a place that appeals to and unites the whole of society by blending spatial and functional structures that cater to a diverse range of workplaces and uses", explains board member Timo Herzberg. David Chipperfield Architects gained international acclaim for the reconstruction of the Neues Museum in Berlin. Current projects include the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, the headquarters of Amorepacific in Seoul and the Nobel Center in Stockholm.

An attractive neighborhood

The Elbtower would add to a long list of attractions in one of the most vibrant quarters of HafenCity: Designed as a dense urban neighborhood with innovative buildings and trend-setting uses, the Elbbrücken quarter is set to complete the redevelopment of Hamburg's former port area by 2025-2030. A high-rise building overlooking the river Elbe and several harbor basins has always been part of the vision for this quarter at the easternmost tip of HafenCity. Public transport connections are excellent, with a new interlinked subway and rapid transit station set to open in December 2018. In addition to close proximity to the main thoroughway between Hamburg and nearby highways, users of the quarter will also benefit from an innovative, sustainable mobility concept covering all of eastern HafenCity. The designs for open spaces drawn up by Atelier Loidl (Berlin) foresee the creation of a broad promenade along the waterfront and a grand central square.

Strong demand

Given all this, it can be no surprise that development sites in Elbbrücken are in high demand, with exclusive options already granted for five plots. The proposed projects will provide a variety of companies with a dynamic and inspiring working environment, and include Germany's first wooden high-rise building, a large innovative healthcare institution, the new, highly sustainable headquarters of a solar energy firm (including flexible niches for start-ups), Hamburg's first major congress hotel (for events attended by 200 to 3,000 participants) and a smart building known as "The Pier".

HafenCity and beyond

The Elbtower would also be a beacon for two new urban development areas in which Hamburg will continue to grow once HafenCity is finished. The Billebogen area spans 79 hectares to the northeast of Elbbrücken and will create an urban production environment offering modern industries and manufacturers a range of new sites and innovative buildings close to the city center. Located across the river Elbe but still within Hamburg's famous port, plans for the Grasbrook area foresee the implementation of a mixed-use development scheme that will take the HafenCity experience to a new level. The Elbtower would therefore one day be fully embedded into Hamburg's cityscape, acting as both a new gateway to the city center and a harmonious, sculptural counterpart to the Elbphilharmonie. In addition to modern office space, it would also house public amenities that tie into lively mixed-use neighborhoods characterized by high levels of sustainability and a fantastic urban atmosphere.

→ Sustainable schemes: The quarter will also be home to Germany's first wooden residential high-rise building (Picture Credit: Störmer Murphy and Partners)



↑ Connecting the dots: The Elbtower will link Hamburg's soon-to-be-completed HafenCity to the new urban development areas of Billebogen and Grasbrook (Picture Credit: fotofrizz / David Chipperfield Architects)



↑ Bursting with vitality: The Elbbrücken quarter will be characterized by innovative buildings such as this one housing a healthcare center focussing on prevention built by insurance companies (Picture Credit: OVG/HENN)



← A photo opportunity in its own right: The new subway and rapid transit station will start operating in December 2018 (Picture Credit: gmp)



↑ Urban skyline: The Elbtower will overlook several smaller high-rise buildings (Picture Credit: Hosoya Schäfer Chipperfield)

Public transport is key

Public transport and cycling are on the rise throughout central Hamburg. In the case of HafenCity, the implementation of a new, innovative mobility concept blending excellent public transport links with a range of other sustainable options such as rental bicycles, car sharing and e-mobility is already under way. One vital element of that concept is the opening of a new subway station designed by Gerkan, Marg and Partner (gmp) in Elbbrücken in December 2018. The building's architecture – and in particular its sweeping roof resembling a mesh of steel girders clad in shimmering glass rhombi – has already become a popular photo opportunity in its own right. In addition to the subway station, Deutsche Bahn is building a new rapid transit station that will be connected to the subway station by a glass bridge. As a result, the U4 subway that connects HafenCity with Hamburg's central station and the city center will be linked to the S3 – the most heavily used rapid transit service in the city. Additional bus stops, a rental bike station and a "Switchh" point offering a variety of car-sharing options will make the Elbbrücken a major new transport hub that will also be of significant importance to the adjoining urban development areas of Billebogen and Grasbrook. Large projects such as the Elbtower and Hamburg's first major congress hotel would have been inconceivable without these outstanding public transport options.

“The Elbtower needs the urban fabric around it”

Without urban surroundings the Elbtower would be a bad idea, but once HafenCity has developed as far as the Elbbrücken, it will make perfectly sense, says architect Christoph Felger.

When crossing the Elbbrücken into Hamburg over the last few years, did you ever think to yourself “The city needs a high rise building here”?

To tell you the truth: No, I did not. After all, you can hardly see the building site from either the road or the rail bridge. I believe the location’s true strength will only become tangible once the development of HafenCity and the neighboring areas has reached a more advanced stage – because the Elbtower needs to be embedded into that urban fabric. The link to the new transportation hub would also play a vital role.

It was only in 2017 that Hamburg welcomed a new architectural icon in the shape of the Elbphilharmonie. Were you inspired – or intimidated – by it during the design process?

The Elbphilharmonie must undoubtedly be regarded as Hamburg’s most iconic building – and that will continue to be the case for many, many years to come. We spent quite some time deliberating the tower’s attitude in that respect. We didn’t want it to be too shy, but we obviously didn’t want it to be too brash either. In the end, we came up with this design. I’m very taken by its subtle elegance and ease of interaction, by its symbolic gesture towards both the city and the concert hall. I would say it maintains a respectful distance without standing in awe of its peers. If you study our design in detail, you will find we have included some exaggerated concave forms that clearly demonstrate how we were inspired by the Herzog & de Meuron building.

So Hamburg and HafenCity could become home to two architectural icons after all?

Yes, I think the Elbtower would become an icon. Not as a result of its height alone, but also because of its own unmistakable character. And anyway, why should Hamburg not have more than one landmark building of international standing? Just look at how lively HafenCity is already becoming. I must admit that I was quite skeptical at the start. In particular, I thought the Masterplan allowed for too many individual buildings aspiring for signature architecture. But look at what the mixed-use concept has already brought to HafenCity. In the long run, I’m certain it will become a great addition to a wonderful city.



↑ Christoph Felger, Partner and Design Director at David Chipperfield Architects, Berlin (Picture Credit: Thomas Hampel)



↑ Hamburg’s Mayor, Olaf Scholz, presented the Elbtower during a press conference at City Hall on February 8th, 2018. (Picture Credit: Thomas Hampel)

The next steps

The project proposal submitted by SIGNA / DCA was selected by an interdisciplinary jury at the end of January further to an intensive architectural competition and contract negotiations that began in November 2017. In addition to quality in terms of urban planning and architecture, jury’s selection was also largely informed by financial reliability and feasibility. All of the eight designs considered will be on display at an exhibition at HafenCity Information Center Kesselhaus from March 3rd through March 18th. Sir David Chipperfield will open the exhibition with a talk on architectural design at 6 p.m. on March 2nd. The development contract is set to be put before the Hamburg Parliament for its approval in spring 2018.

HafenCity InfoCenter im Kesselhaus (entrance free)

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Tues-Sun, 10am-6pm; closed Mon
www.hafencity.com

Imprint

Publisher:
HafenCity Hamburg GmbH,
Osakaallee 11, 20457 Hamburg,
www.HafenCity.com
**Responsible for content, Author/
Editor:** Henrike Thomsen
Design: Rock&Stars digital GmbH,
Hamburg

Translation, Final editing:
Twiggs Translations
Print: Langebartels & Jürgens,
Hamburg
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